

Legislative Report

Continuation of Temporary Dental Hygiene License Provision

December 1, 1996



Washington State Department of

Health

Health Professions Quality Assurance

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Executive Summary

In 1993 the Legislature created a temporary license program for dental hygienists.

Washington State law allows dental hygienists to practice expanded functions not allowed in other states. These functions include local anesthetic administration, nitrous oxide/oxygen analgesia administration and restorative dentistry which includes the placing and carving of restoratives.

The Legislature was concerned about the affect of these additional requirements on the availability of dental hygienists practicing in Washington and created the temporary license as one strategy to address the issue.

However, the Legislature stated in its intent that the temporary licenses were not to be considered a complete solution to the perceived shortage of dental hygienists and also encouraged expansion of dental hygiene training programs at the state's colleges and universities.

Findings

The department has identified the following alternatives to granting temporary licenses:

- *Provide a license structure that corresponds to the expanded functions (local anesthetic administration, nitrous oxide/oxygen analgesia administration and restorative dentistry which includes the placing and carving of restoratives).*
- *Increase the number of accredited dental hygiene education programs.*

Recommendation

The Department of Health recommends continuing the temporary license provision.

Background

The Legislature created chapter 18.29 RCW, the Dental Hygiene Practice Act for the regulation of dental hygiene licensure. The statute also created the Dental Hygiene Examining Committee consisting of three practicing Dental Hygienists and one public member appointed by the Secretary of the Department of Health.

The Secretary of the Department of Health, in consultation with the Washington Dental Hygiene Examining Committee shall, among other things:

(1) Adopt rules in accordance with chapter 34.05 RCW necessary to prepare and conduct examinations for dental hygiene licensure;

(2) Require an applicant for licensure to pass an examination consisting of written and practical tests upon such subjects and of such scope as the committee determines; and

(3) Set the standards for passage of the examination;

License Types

There are three types of licenses available for dental hygienists to practice in Washington State.

(1) Temporary Licensure (RCW 18.29.190)

Temporary licenses were implemented in 1993 and will expire January 1998. A temporary license issued for 18 months allows out-of-state applicants the ability to be employed while obtaining the additional educational requirements for the expanded functions which are:

- Nitrous oxide administration, which requires didactic and clinical competency;
- Restorative dentistry, which requires didactic and clinical competency in the placement of restorations into cavities prepared by a dentist and didactic and clinical competency in the carving, contouring, and adjusting contacts and occlusions.

Of the 174 temporary license applications received since 1993, 160 have been issued. They include 70 active, 90 expired and 14 pending. Of the 160 temporary licenses issued, 40% have since obtained permanent licensure. An additional 6% have completed the additional education required and applied for a permanent license.

(2) Licensure by examination (RCW 18.29.021)

An applicant is eligible for licensure upon successful completion of an accredited dental hygiene program which includes the expanded functions, or if the applicant obtains expanded function education through an approved course.

In order to become licensed as a dental hygienist, an applicant must pass an examination consisting of four parts:

- (1) Washington written examination;
- (2) Washington restorative practical examination;
- (3) Western Regional Examining Board (WREB)-
Patient Evaluation / Prophylaxis (combination); and
- (4) WREB, Local Anesthetic Examination

There are currently five accredited dental hygiene programs and one accreditation eligible program in the state of Washington with the total student capacity of 136 per class.

Accredited

- (1) Clark Community College, Vancouver
- (2) Shoreline Community College, Seattle
- (3) Pierce College, Tacoma
- (4) Eastern Washington University, Spokane
- (5) Yakima Valley Community College, Yakima

Eligible

- (1) Lake Washington Technical College, Kirkland

(3) Licensure by endorsement or credentials (RCW 18.29.045)

An applicant may apply for licensure if they have been issued a license, registration or certificate to practice dental hygiene, without restrictions, in another state by successful completion of an examination, and if the other state's current examination parts are substantially equivalent to all four examination parts required for licensure in the state of Washington.

If the other state's licensing standards are substantially equivalent for one or more parts of the examination, the applicant may qualify for interstate endorsement on that part or those parts. The rest of the examination must be successfully completed to qualify for licensure

Alternatives to issuing temporary licenses

The Department of Health has analyzed the following alternatives to continuing to grant temporary licenses for dental hygienists.

(1) Provide a license structure that corresponds to the expanded functions (local anesthetic administration, nitrous oxide/oxygen analgesia administration and restorative dentistry which includes the placing and carving of restoratives).

PRO: As the qualifications in education and demonstration of minimum competency would require less, the applicant pool could be increased.

For example, a person who had the required skill level in only one function would receive license authority to practice basic dental hygiene plus that function.

There could also be an increase in the number of applicants because a few other states prepare dental hygienists in expanded functions. According to the American Dental Association's 1993 survey on Legal Provisions for Delegating Functions to Dental Hygienists: six states allow practice in restorative, thirteen states allow practice in the administration of nitrous oxide/oxygen analgesia, and fourteen states allow practice in local anesthetic.

CON: This could decrease the number of licensed dental hygienists who could perform the expanded functions. Out of state applicants would not have an incentive to learn the expanded functions.

Also, the expanded functions might not be offered in Washington State dental hygiene programs as the reduced number of dental hygiene students would not make it cost effective.

Six Washington State dental hygiene programs include the expanded functions in their curriculum. The three expanded functions have been part of the dental hygiene scope of practice since 1975.

A Department of Health survey of 3600 licensed dental hygienists, in August 1996, demonstrated that of the 1930 responses : 32% practice restorative, 91% practice administration of local anesthetic, and 78% administer nitrous oxide/oxygen analgesia. Many of the responses to the survey indicated that the ability to perform the expanded functions better enabled the hygienist to provide overall quality care to the patients. Some of the responses indicated that the hygienists did not perform restorative procedures in their practice because it was not delegated to them by the dentist. Also, some of the responses indicated that they did not administer nitrous oxide/oxygen analgesia as it was not used in the office where they practiced.

(2) Increase the number of accredited dental hygiene education programs.

PRO: The applicant pool for licensure could be increased. Currently there are five accredited dental hygiene programs (outlined on page 7).

One new dental hygiene program was created in 1995 at the Lake Washington Technical College in Kirkland. They are currently considered accreditation eligible and are scheduled for an accreditation site visit in 1997. This added a possible 24 new students to the applicant pool annually. The American Dental Association Commission on Dental Accreditation Standards of 1993 are the approved accrediting standards.

Also, there are currently two approved expanded function education programs, Pierce College in Tacoma and Clark College in Vancouver, which are adequately serving approximately 54 out-of-state applicants who are in need of this particular education as it was not included in their accredited curriculum. There is also one approved program at Phoenix College in Arizona for local anesthetic and nitrous administration only.

CON: The establishment of additional accredited dental hygiene programs or approved expanded functions programs requires appropriate funding and preparation to meet accrediting and approved criteria.

Recommendation

The Department of Health recommends continuing the temporary license provision, as it assists out-of-state applicants in transitioning into the state and provide basic traditional duties for access to care prior to the applicant becoming permanently licensed. The Legislature enacted the expanded functions to increase the quality of, and access to, dental hygiene services. The temporary license structure provides a safe and reasonable approach to giving out-of-state applicants a chance to meet Washington's scope of practice.